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RECENT DISCUSSIONS OF MORAL EVOLUTION

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Ethical writers, like biologists, are no longer concerned with the mere fact of evolution. They are dealing with more specific questions of causes and methods. And, as with biology, two stages in the study may be expected. Biologists were at first interested in the historical question: What was the origin of species? They were temporarily satisfied with the answer: Natural selection, operating in conjunction with heredity and variation. Now, however, a clue to the specific method of heredity has been found in Mendelism, the causes operative in producing variation are being discovered by experimentation, and biology is entering upon a constructive stage which promises great results for agriculture, and perhaps also for human health and well-being. Ethics is as yet almost entirely in the descriptive stage. Perhaps we are staggered at the complexity of present problems, and timidly leave to the practical reformer or politician the responsible task of making positive suggestions. But, when the past evolution has been thoroughly analyzed, it may be hoped that social reform and moral education will be more intelligent. The interest of these problems for the student of religion is also obvious. For, to illustrate by one suggestion out of many, we ask: What causes the difference in the ideals of different ages and races? Is it religion, or philosophy, or economic needs and conditions solely? And shall the religious teacher who would hasten the Kingdom of God appeal to the conscience or to the legislature, or, in the conviction that neither

of these avails, shall he stand still and wait for the inventor and the inevitable social revolution? It would be absurd to say that we are yet in a position to answer this old question conclusively, but it is not too much to say that no one can now afford to give dogmatic answers without first considering the complexity of the interaction which is increasingly coming into view between religious, political, economic, aesthetic, and ethical factors.

The important literature in this field which has appeared within the past five years¹ may be conveniently treated by noting what it has to say on one or more of four questions: (1) What is the origin of the idea and feeling of moral obligation? (2) In what respects has there been evolution and what are the chief stages in the process? (3) What are the causes or occasions of changes in morality? (4) What criterion shall be used in judging the evolution, to determine whether a given change is moral advance or the reverse? More particularly at present, this is apt to take the form: Is moral evolution an increasing knowledge of one true standard of right and good *plus* an increased willingness to follow this, or is there an increasing change in the good itself? This is the question of absolutism *versus* pragmatism.

I

In seeking the origin of moral ideas and sentiments, the most significant tendency is the increased importance given to custom. It has long been recognized that custom was the antecedent of conscious moral conduct, but the precise significance of this is

¹ The following books are referred to in the text, although some of them deal only incidentally with the genetic questions which we are considering:

Edward Westermarck, *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, vol. i, 1906; vol. ii, 1908.

Leonard T. Hobhouse, *Morals in Evolution*, 1906.

William G. Sumner, *Folkways*, 1907.

John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics*, 1908.

Edward A. Ross, *Social Psychology*, 1908.

William McDougall, *An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 1908.

C. H. Cooley, *Social Organization*, 1909.

Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty*, 1908.

Hugo Münsterberg, *The Eternal Values*, 1909.

John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*, 1910.

Addison W. Moore, *Pragmatism and its Critics*, 1910.

now emerging more clearly. No such comprehensive survey of customs as is afforded by Sumner and Westermarck had previously been available. The very mass of the material undoubtedly brings a certain impression not produced by a presentation less fully attested by documents. But the various studies of social psychology by Tarde, Baldwin, Cooley, Giddings, Wundt, and others had also prepared for a better interpretation of this material. Formerly, too, custom was thought of as belonging chiefly, if not solely, to savage life. We thought of taboos and lucky rites, of "cleanness" and sacrifices, of initiations and the ban upon speaking with a mother-in-law. Westermarck gives us a wealth of such material. But Sumner presents no less impressively the dominant influence of customs as a factor in present civilization. Under the guise of "mores" they shape our thinking and conduct in all except the tiny sphere in which we may be able and willing to do some thinking for ourselves. Ross and Cooley have thrown light upon some of the laws at work in the formation and transmission of such customs. It may be expected that special studies on special manifestations of such group standards and local standards will appear. Instead of viewing our fellows abstractly, and appealing, often with complete futility, to the supposedly unbiassed conscience of an everywhere equal man, we shall recognize the complexity of motives, and though we may not accept the economic or sociological determinism which makes all moral standards the bare resultant of economic and sociological forces, we shall yet appreciate more clearly what may be expected in immediate response, and what may come only as a result of a changed habit of mind. Furthermore, the instructive comparisons made by Westermarck and Hobhouse between the attitudes of various times and peoples inevitably tend to awaken a questioning temper toward many current usages which are now unthinkingly or complacently accepted. To show the likeness between present and savage morality on this and that matter tends alike to increase our respect for the savage and to prevent satisfaction with ourselves.

What, then, is the meaning of custom? How does custom establish itself, and under what conditions? By what agencies is it changed or replaced?

Custom has in it two well-marked factors, somewhat differently phrased by various writers, namely, (a) habit, (b) valuation of a general, or at least non-personal, sort. Thus Hobhouse says:

It is not merely a habit of action, but it implies also a judgment upon action, and a judgment stated in general and impersonal terms.

Similarly, Westermarck holds that all morality rests on disinterested retributive emotions (kindly or the reverse). But some retributive emotions are not moral. Why is it then, he asks, that disinterestedness, apparent impartiality, and the flavor of generality have become characteristics by which so-called moral emotions are distinguished from other retributive emotions? The solution of this problem, according to Westermarck, lies in the fact that society is the birthplace of the moral consciousness; that the first moral judgments expressed, not the private emotions of isolated individuals, but emotions which were felt by the society at large; that tribal custom was the earliest rule of duty. Customs have been defined as public habits, the habits of a certain circle. But custom is also a rule of conduct, and as such it is a generalization of emotional tendencies. The most salient feature of custom is its generality. It is fixed once for all, and takes no notice of the preferences of individuals. By recognizing the validity of a custom I implicitly admit that the custom is equally binding for me and for you and for all the other members of the society. This involves disinterestedness; I admit that a breach of custom is equally wrong whether I am myself immediately concerned in the act or not. It also involves apparent impartiality. And though a certain rule may have a selfish or partial origin, it becomes a true custom, a moral rule, as soon as the selfishness or the particularity of its makers is lost sight of.

Sumner has used two distinct words to emphasize the two aspects. By "folkways" he thinks of customs chiefly under their aspects of uniformity, repetition, and wide concurrence. But when popular usages and traditions include a judgment that they are conducive to societal welfare, and when they exert a coercion on the individual to conform to them, although they are not co-ordinated by any authority, he calls them "mores."

Doubtless the term "customs" suggests but slightly any moral element, and to bring out strongly the factor of control and emotional approval it is desirable to use a term less neutral. The name "mores" promises to gain acceptance. Sumner, indeed, in his emphasis upon the mores denies that there is any other morality or ethics worthy of study:

The modern peoples have made morals and morality a separate domain by the side of religion, philosophy, and politics. In that sense morals is an impossible and unreal category. It has no existence and can have none. The word moral means what belongs or appertains to the mores. Therefore the category of morals can never be defined without reference to something outside of itself.

Out of the mores grow institutions and laws, and from time to time philosophers attempt to formulate the ideals found in the mores, and use them as moral standards, supposing that they derive them from some source above experience. But the mores are really the only standard. They are as such true and right for their age and place.

After all, the peculiar character of custom which makes it so close to the moral consciousness has never been better stated than by Grote:

"Nomos, king of all" . . . moulding the emotions as well as the intellect, according to the local type . . . and reigning under the appearance of habitual, self-suggested tendencies.²

All the more significant, if customs, or mores, are so important alike for the origins of morality and for its present continuance and variation, become the questions: How are customs or mores formed? Does the habit explain the authority? or was there some sort of value which gave rise to the habit? or is neither of these explanations adequate? Let us then ask, first, How did the habit get formed? and, secondly, What gives certain habits their peculiar value and authority?

First, on the origin of habits it is not safe to speak too positively, for the most important customs go back into unknown ages. But there are several things to be borne in mind. Ex-

² Cited in Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, p. 173.

planations tend to emphasize either (a) the instinctive, impulsive, or emotional aspect of action, or (b) the intelligent adaptation of means to ends. Blood revenge, for example,—is this a sort of blind response to injury, analogous to winking the eye or striking out with the fist for protection? Or is it a useful means of protecting the tribe? Or in the case of marriage customs and taboos, does the custom of taking a wife outside the group rest on supposed advantage, or merely on emotional response to novelty? Students of religion have discussed a similar alternative. Does a ritual rest on some idea, or does the idea, the myth, arise after the ritual? As the tendency is toward the belief that the ritual is usually older than its myth, so the general tendency is to regard customs as arising largely in relatively unreflective fashion. Comparative psychology has some data which at least are in accord with this. Modern studies of animals show that they learn largely by the method of trial and error. A rat or squirrel seems to learn his way through a maze, or how to open a door, not by a study of its construction and a resort to general principle (the method of the expert scientist), nor by accidentally finding the correct way, and thenceforth discarding completely all false movements. His “curve” of learning does not change so decisively at any one point. The process appears to be rather a gradual discard of fruitless efforts, and a retention of the successful elements. Experienced pleasure may help to fix the latter, pain to eliminate the former. Similarly, it may be argued, men had to get food, defend themselves, reproduce their kind. They either succeeded or failed, and the successful ways survived.

But it is evident that most of the customs which are morally significant cannot be explained solely as the results of habit. For ceremonies which are performed once a year for the returning spring or ingathering of harvest, or at irregular intervals, as upon occasion of births, marriages, and deaths, cannot be based merely upon the physiology of repeated acts. The structure which carries these customs is not the individual's nervous system considered by itself: it is the social organization.

This operates in part just by its mass. If a number of persons are to do the same thing, such as dancing, or singing, or carrying, or if they are to act jointly in hunting, or in co-operation, as

in converse, there must be uniformity. And imitation is constantly operative in passing down ways, once used. The emotional enhancement due to mass or concerted action deepens the impression, especially when the aesthetic charm of order is involved.

Moreover the general notion is common that certain ways of acting are "lucky" and others unlucky. This is not so rationalistic a method as a scientist's calculation of the practical utility of various agencies, and still it is none the less a philosophy. Sumner makes much of this tendency to dwell on good and bad luck—especially bad luck:

Primitive men ascribed all incidents to the agency of men or of ghosts and spirits. Good and ill luck were attributed to the superior powers, and were supposed to be due to their pleasure or displeasure at the conduct of men. This group of notions constitutes goblinism. It furnishes a complete world-philosophy.

The four elemental needs or interests out of which folkways sprang, in Sumner's view, are hunger, love, vanity, and fear.

The use of the term "vanity" to cover the whole sphere of social recognition, reminding us, as it does, of Mandeville, is one of many traces of Sumner's refusal to take account of modern social psychology. McDougall, starting with a psychological analysis based on the various instincts and their corresponding emotions, offers a wider and, I think, a more satisfactory list of primary activities. In any case, resentment or anger can hardly be omitted, and Westermarck makes this, in its special form of public or sympathetic resentment, the source of all the moral customs. In his opinion, custom is a moral rule only on account of the indignation called forth by its transgression. In its ethical aspect it is nothing but a generalization of emotional tendencies, applied to certain modes of conduct, and transmitted from generation to generation.

But, while the simplest form of acts may become habitual without any great degree of reflection, it is obvious that few acts, even of those required to satisfy hunger, are performed without a considerable amount of thought. All such conceptions as good or bad luck, and such customs as those of initiation, lucky rites

to insure rains, birth and death customs implying belief in spirits, involve some look ahead, and often some conception of group welfare. Hence it is comprehensible that we find the Australian old men deliberating at great length over the details of initiation and totem customs. Ross shows how customs radiate from certain leaders or classes to the masses. It may be impossible for you or me to start a new custom, but it is easy for royalty to set a fashion, and, for a time at least, wealth can make success the dominant note in the mores of American society.

To sum up, customs, while seemingly analogous to habits in the individual, cannot be explained by physiological repetition. They embody a philosophy, and depend for their transmission not only upon the simpler process of imitation, but upon the more positive method of training.

Secondly, whence comes the binding quality, or the value, in custom? If we suppose that the custom arose because of its practical utility, then, of course, we have already answered our second question, and this would be just as true even if such a custom as burying the possessions of the deceased with him is to our notion of economics an absurd or injurious practice. If people believed that to show this kindness to the dead was useful to the living, that would be enough. But there are many customs for which savages themselves give no reason, and for these a sanction has been sought either in the bare force of habit itself or in emotional reaction.

There is no doubt a considerable constraint exercised by habit itself. "Whatever be the foundation for a certain practice," says Westermarck, "and however trivial it may be, the unreflecting mind has a tendency to disapprove of any deviation from it for the simple reason that such a deviation is unusual. As Abraham Tucker observes, 'it is a constant argument among the common people, that a thing must be done and ought to be done, because it always has been done.'" Professor Ames in his *Psychology of Religious Experience* states the psychology of the process thus:

Habitual actions establish themselves as the lines of least resistance. They are familiar and put the object of them at ease. He is at home in them. So much is this the case that in moments of leisure the successfully thrilling events of the chase or battle are

often reenacted, and this is undoubtedly an important factor in the origin of ceremonial. They serve to reinstate the emotional experience of the real events.

As an illustration of a custom originating in emotional interests but now sanctioned by habit, Professor Ames cites dress:

The history of dress seems to show that it originated with amulets and ornaments and was fostered by the love of display which it favored, but its establishment resulted in the feeling that it was proper to conceal the body, that is, the habit of having the body covered must not be broken. This is the ground for saying that the custom of wearing clothes created modesty.

This position as to the positive power of habit is in the opinion of Ames strengthened by a consideration of taboo, which he would define as the "negative side of custom," the thou-shalt-not, as custom is the thou-shalt of primitive life. Taboo in many cases seems to signify just what is strange or unusual, and the psychology of this is that the very disposition to act in a certain way affords resistance to any deviation from that course. And he makes a highly ingenious application to the explanation of sex-taboo. Crawley in his work, *The Mystic Rose*, had collected a mass of material showing the wide range of sex-taboo and the fear entertained by each sex of certain functions, occupations, and objects associated with the other. A warrior, for example, fears to have a woman look upon him lest he be weakened. The separation of the sexes is due to such or similar fears. Ames would reverse this:

The more defensible position would be that the segregation of the sexes was due to natural causes, such as occupation, food-supply, capacities, and interests. The characteristic habits of each sex which thus arose brought their natural sanctions and restraints, or taboos. These taboos in turn exercised a reciprocal influence and contributed to emphasize the segregation from which they originally arose.³

The other important taboos, attaching to leaders, strangers, and the dead, are explained in similar ways.

It is obvious that there is a large field of moral sentiments

³ Psychology of Religious Experience, chap. iv.

in which it would be interesting to test this theory that habit creates binding force. A good part of our morals are class morals. Are, then, the sentiments sanctioning the gentleman's code, or the commercial code, or the laborer's code, due to the habits of these classes, which were in turn created by occupation? Leaving this for the moment, it is evident that in such customs as dress, or sex-taboo, there is a factor which can be called habit only in a metaphorical sense. This appears in the following quotation from Westermarck, who is arguing for the genesis of emotion from habit:

In the behavior of the Aleut, who "is bashful if caught doing anything unusual among his people," and in the average European's dread of appearing singular, we recognize the influence of the same force of habit.

But is "the dread of appearing singular" due in any sense to habit? This seems to be an extraordinary statement, to be explained only on the assumption that the social group is loosely conceived as a physiological organism, so that what is "unusual" is opposed to the habitual. In society, however, we constantly see illustrations where the habitual (in the proper sense of the term, meaning repeated action by an individual) becomes "singular" or "unusual," if measured by a group standard, and so is at once condemned. It is *failure to conform to the group*, not failure to repeat a past act, which excites the painful emotion. The tension is not primarily between habit and novelty, but between social self (used in James's sense as "what others think of me") and some other set of images. It is a case of mass phenomena rather than of repetition. This would seem to be the larger factor also in the case of dress. And, in general, conformity to custom does not primarily mean repeating; it means that the young conform to the old, the plastic to the well-organized. Ritual impresses its values not only by the practice it gives in doing, but by the strongly emotional conditions under which it is done.

Another criticism upon the conception that habit is adequate to produce a binding influence is made by Professor Sharp in *A Study of the Influence of Custom on the Moral Judgment*.⁴

⁴ University of Wisconsin Publications.

From a study of the moral judgments made by University of Wisconsin students upon certain questions of casuistry he finds no ground for supposing the basis of such judgments to be mere habit. He finds a teleological factor—some reference to the welfare of the agent or of others—in so large a proportion of cases as to convince him that this is generally present. Questions have been raised as to the adequacy of the method employed in this inquiry, but the necessity of having some account of our own actual moral judgments (as well as of the customs of savages) which Sharp forcefully presents, cannot be gainsaid.

To resume our query as to what gives binding force to custom, it should not be inferred from the quotation from Westermarck that he regards habit as the chief source of the binding force and value in custom. It is in the emotions that he discovers what gives value. Specifically, moral value is due to one kind of retributive emotions, namely, to those which are public and sympathetic. This is argued especially against the utilitarian conception. A crucial case is found in our attitude toward punishment. Why do we punish, and why does our moral sentiment approve punishment? The penalties of criminal law, Westermarck believes, have in all ages and among all peoples substantially expressed the amount of public indignation, though the purpose of protecting society has doubtless also been present. But if this latter were the determining factor, it might be plausibly urged that the more atrocious crimes, like parricide, are so rare that society needs little protection and that consequently the punishment should be light. Or, if reformation be the end, then the hopeless and hardened criminal should not be punished at all, since it is useless to try to reform him. Westermarck has several highly interesting chapters here, showing who are held responsible for acts, how far agents under intellectual disability have been treated as responsible, and how far motives are considered. Nothing but the will, he finds, is held to be morally good or bad; and this, he believes, confirms his view as to the essentially emotional origin of all moral distinctions.

Moral judgments are based on conduct and character, because such judgments spring from moral emotions; because the moral emotions are retributive emotions; because a retributive emotion is a reactive

attitude of mind, either kindly or hostile, toward a living being (or something looked upon in the light of a living being) regarded as a cause of pleasure or as a cause of pain; and because a living being is regarded as a true cause of pleasure or pain only in so far as this feeling is assumed to be caused by its will.

A larger range of emotions which play an important part in moral valuation would be indicated by many. Thus Dewey, speaking of control over impulses as one of the elements in moral conduct, remarks that calculation of the utilitarian type is not adequate to deal with the temptation which tends to fling consequences aside and yield to the excitement of the moment.

With those who are carried away habitually by some mode of excitement the disease and the incapacity to take the proffered remedy or reflection are one and the same thing. Only some other passion will accomplish the desired control. With the Greeks, it was aesthetic passion, love of the grace and beauty, the rhythm and harmony, of a self-controlled life. With the Romans it was the passion for dignity, power, honor of personality, evidenced in rule of appetite. Both of these motives remain among the strong allies of ordered conduct. But the passion for purity, the sense of something degrading and foul in surrender to the base, an interest in something spotless, free from adulteration, are, in some form or other, the chief resource in overcoming the tendency of excitement to usurp the governance of the self.⁵

A further reason for assigning importance to the emotional factor is offered by Professor G. H. Mead.⁶ He points out the fundamental part of emotion in all attitudes toward persons. All my consciousness has its emotional tone. When I set apart certain of its contents as things, I divest them of this tone. But contact with persons evokes the emotional content, and when we think of our objects as personal, the emotional remains as a—perhaps as *the*—distinctive quality. The primary inference which the author draws from this is that social psychology, which deals with the personal antecedents of emotion, is as necessary a pre-

⁵ Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, pp. 409 f.; cf. also J. H. Tufts, "Moral Value," in *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, vol. v, 1908, pp. 517–522.

⁶ *Psychological Bulletin*, vol., vi, 1909, pp. 401–408.

requisite to psychology as is physiological psychology, which describes the antecedents of mental processes from another point of view. It is evident, however, that the consideration has important bearings on the genesis of moral sentiment.

Starting, then, with a question about the customs and mores, we have been led over into general considerations as to the moral consciousness which repeat in new form the question of Hume: "Are moral distinctions based on reason or on feeling?" And we find it no longer possible to decide for either alternative. The control and valuation of life involve habit, emotion, and reason. Earlier forms of control have more of the elements of habit; more developed types have more of the rational. The emotional element attends all the way up the scale; and even in custom the rational factor is present in some degree. So far as any practice or belief tends to sink into mere habit, it has little moral value. As attention is demanded, the moral possibilities increase. Customs which attend such important events or crises as birth, puberty, marriage, death, seed-time and harvest, new moon, quarrels, injuries, hospitality,—these customs pass readily into true mores. For they are in essence a control of life for important ends; and as glorified or enhanced by aesthetic elements of dance and song, of decoration, commemoration, or dramatic rehearsal, they constitute—not indeed the full personal morality of the highest level—but the morality which we all obey on many of the levels of conduct.

II

In what respect has there been moral evolution, and what are the chief stages in the process? This is the problem which Hobhouse treats, and he discusses it under the two heads of the standard, or rule of action, and of the basis or reason given for obeying it. The standard has been embodied in custom and law, in ethical institutions. The basis—the ideas underlying morality—is sought in a study of religions and of the great ethical systems. The institutions selected by Hobhouse to show evolution of the moral standard are the general social and political structure, law and justice, marriage and the status of woman, intertribal and international relations, class relations with especial reference

to slavery, property, and the treatment of poverty. This is a much less extended list of topics than is presented by Westermarck, and the treatment is less copious. But on the other hand the perspective is better, and the trends of progress are more easily noted. These trends as traced by Hobhouse in the various institutions show certain broad lines of resemblance. For the religious and social teacher or reformer, frequently discouraged by the slow movement of the particular cause he champions, it is well worth while to stand where he can take a survey of centuries rather than of years or decades. And I doubt whether any one can presume to discuss intelligently such current problems as divorce, equal suffrage, the administration of justice in our courts, property rights and responsibilities, until he has traced sympathetically the status of woman, the methods of judicial practice, and the queer mixtures of reason and unreason, of force and kindness, which are found in the various ages. With vision thus trained we shall be less likely to fall into a state of blind admiration for things as they are, but we shall also comprehend better the difficulties in the way of such a reform as that of the equal standard for morals between the sexes, or that of apportioning educational opportunities to children upon the basis of their capacities rather than upon that of the pecuniary status of their parents.

The general line of advance is "from status to contract," from kin-group, through force and authority, to organization in the interests of individual freedom and social co-operation; from looser family structure, through closer ties controlled by force or property conceptions, to unions giving at the same time greater personal freedom and greater responsibility; from blood-feud to public courts possessing greater authority yet securing better protection to the individual; from early communism, through property rights based on force and recognizing few restrictions, to a system of property involving in increasing degree a social control; and finally, in the treatment of the poor, "from simple communism through the paternal benevolence of a superior caste to the recognition of a mutual obligation as between the individual and the state." There is thus a double movement, and different theorists are apt to stress the one or the other aspect according to

their own interests. On the one hand there is growth in the powers and opportunities of the individual. On the other, the social control is both strengthened and extended. Liberty and order thus often clash. Yet in the conceptions of rights, both aspects are implicit, for the individual relies upon society to support him in these, and it will support him only if these "rights" are not against the social order. "In the higher form of social organization we have seen order and liberty drawing together again, the underlying truth which unites them being simply that the best ordered society is that which gives most scope to its component members to make the best of themselves, while the 'best' in human nature is that which contributes to the harmony and onward movement of society."

The reasons or motives for moral conduct likewise show an evolution. For Westermarck, since the moral attitude is always fundamentally one of retributive emotions, the evolution is chiefly either in the increase of rational elements or in the extension of the group included within the emotional sphere. Aversions and disgusts, sympathies and antipathies, are the earlier forms of moral emotions. When we realize that an act does no real harm, we can hardly—if we are sufficiently rational—give it moral censure. So a *deliberate* resentment is not likely to be felt toward a person who intended no injury. The other line of advance, namely, the extension of the group toward which duties are recognized from family or clan to humanity, is, in his view, consequent upon the expansion of altruistic sentiment,—an order of dependence which many would reverse.

Hobhouse has a more complex psychology, and essays a scheme of development which would relate the ethical to the general philosophy—or religion—of the age or people. As Westermarck's view might be called an emotional theory tempered by advancing intelligence, so Hobhouse's might be called rationalism. On this theory ethical evolution is the evolution of the ethical idea, of which the central element is obligation. Obligation is at first chiefly a matter of resentment, not founded on any general ethical principle. Life and property are defended by blood-vengeance, but not *because* life and property are clearly set up as ends to be guarded. Magic and taboo are strong sanctions. In earlier

stages of civilization a step in advance is taken when such rights as life and property are recognized by the community, and in many cases placed under the protection of some god. A god who punishes acts because they are wrong is very different from a god who merely avenges an injury. "His existence is recognition of the moral idea." But the divine world is long a blur of the just and unjust, so that an ethical ideal has to be worked out. This has been done in close connection with the spiritualized ideal of religion; and forgiveness, self-sacrifice, humility, find a place. Finally, philosophical criticism remodels ethical conceptions in accordance with the principle that every rule of conduct must be based upon the demonstrable needs of human life. "Obligation, resting at first on occult forces, or the resentment of vindictive spirits, and then on the wrath of a not unjust god, comes to be based on the nobler desire to be at one with God or to realize a higher spiritual life, and finally, extrinsic consequence being dispensed with, on the inherent goodness of the life which it renders possible."

It will be observed that, although neither Westermarck nor Hobhouse finds the origin of morality in religion, Hobhouse gives religion a highly important part in the process of moral evolution. Westermarck recognizes the enormous influence of religion, but balances the gains over against the losses.

Religion or superstition (as the case may be) has on the one hand stigmatized murder and suicide, on the other it has commended human sacrifice and certain cases of voluntary self-destruction. It has inculcated humanity and charity, but has also led to the cruel persecution of persons embracing another creed. It has emphasized the duty of truth-speaking, and has itself been a cause of pious fraud. It has promoted both cleanly habits and filthiness. It has enjoined labor and abstinence from labor, sobriety and drunkenness, marriage and celibacy, chastity and temple prostitution.

Similarly Hobhouse, in a passage too long for quotation, gives a careful consideration of the debits and credits of Christianity—especially of organized Christianity—in the accounts of moral progress. One can imagine nothing more helpful as a foundation for the candid and honest presentation of the place of religion and of Christianity than a study of this material.

III

What are the causes of moral evolution? During the period of Darwin and his contemporaries this question naturally took the form of asking, How far is natural selection active in the field of ethics? Darwin himself, Wallace, Bagehot, Spencer, all discussed the values of the several virtues for aiding survival. But just as biologists are at present not asking, Why do new characters survive? but, How do they originate? so the students of ethical evolution face the question, What forces, social and psychological, bring about the upward steps? Sumner is very positive in his answer as to what does *not* change the mores. It is not ethics. In fact he frequently condemns the attempts to change mores by moral theory. The actual causes to which he attributes such change are usually economic.

Wilberforce did not overthrow slavery, natural forces reduced to the service of man and the discovery of new land set men "free" from great labor, and new ways suggested new sentiments of humanity and ethics. . . . Witchcraft and trial by torture were not abolished by argument. Critical knowledge and thirst for reality made them absurd. . . . The notion of obscenity is very modern. It is due to the modern development of the arts of life and the mode of life under steam and machinery. . . . All the operations and necessities of life can be carried on with greater privacy and more observation of conventional order and decorum. . . . Pair marriage has swept all other forms away. It is the system of the urban-middle-capitalist class. It has gained strength in all the new countries, where all men and women were equal within a small margin and the women bore their share of the struggle for existence. . . . Democracy and pair marriage are now produced by the same conditions. Both are contingent and transitory. In aristocratic society, a man's family arrangements are his own prerogative. When life becomes harder it will become aristocratic, and concubinage may be expected to arise again.

Still more broadly,

There are no ethical forces in history. . . . A people sometimes adopts an ideal of national vanity, which includes ambition, but an ethical ideal no group ever has.

One might infer from these and numerous other citations which might be made that no conscious effort for improvement in morals had ever been, or could ever be, of any influence,—in other words, that morality is the only region in which there is no use in knowing what is wanted and then trying to get it. And yet this would be to make Sumner more consistent than he is. What he is really concerned to show is that it is only by careful study of the *ethos* and sentiments of a people that new ideals can be made to live, and that changes must be very gradual. Our own mores as regards sex-relations come down by tradition from the prophetic revolt of the tenth century before Christ in Israel. This was rooted in the hostility of primitive rustic mores to the luxury of commercial cities. But the experiences of various societies since then have confirmed the prophetic attitude toward sensuality and built up a strong conviction. In the case of amusements, especially, intelligent control is in place. "Amusements always present a necessity for moral education and moral will." And in one instance, that of slavery, moral motives have succeeded in getting themselves recognized as superior to other interests. "Slavery is now considered impossible, socially and politically evil, and so not available for economic gain, even if it could win that. It is the only case in the history of the mores where the so-called moral motive has been made controlling."

The truth in Sumner's contention doubtless is that men are only in part governed by purely rational motives. Just as the mores are a joint product of instinct and need, of habit and purpose, of fictitious belief and reasoned expedience, of emotion and idea, so individuals and peoples are moved by a complex of forces. The present moral awakening in business and public life is doubtless due in part to those whose economic interests were affected by the enormous powers of corporate wealth. And few modern moralists would question that a wrong course of conduct will in the long run injure some one. But the most effective appeal against any practice is not made until it is declared to be wrong or unjust. And this implies that the ethical aspect of the custom or practice is separated out from the merely habitual and brought to attention. It may be vain to cry when every one is satisfied, but when the pressure or collision of social or psychic

forces raises an issue, then the prophet and the reformer get their hearing. The socialist, who insists strenuously on the economic interpretation of history, nevertheless carries on a constant campaign for the triumph of his cause, and is far from being disposed to stand still and see the salvation of the social revolution.

Two questions then remain: What brings on such crises or collisions as to bring moral issues to attention? and Why is it that in such crises the human race—or at any rate certain strains of it—has risen to the new situation and constructed a higher standard?

The first question has had many answers. In general, however, the conflict between the assertive interests of the individual and the control exercised by the group will include a large number of special cases. Economic changes, the advance of the arts and sciences, military conflicts, afford external occasions; sexual passions, desire for property, for mastery or liberty, for esteem and position, are the internal strivings which create new forms of tension. And, beside the collisions between individual and society, the crash of whole peoples on a great scale may overwhelm the existing code. The Jewish view of the relation between virtue and prosperity seems to have been changed by the captivity. The influence of the frontier and its attendant democracy has largely superseded in many of its details such a class-code as that of the "gentleman." Professor Thomas C. Hall's recent *History of Ethics within Organized Christianity* shows the influence upon ethical ideals of the struggle by which a community organizes itself to resist hostile forces and to control its members. There is no more inviting field for the student of moral evolution than the more specific analysis of certain great ethical ideals within the history of civilization and an examination of the causes which have made them what they were, or are.

This leads us to consider the two possible methods for studying moral evolution, the one by topics, the other by regions or epochs or peoples. Professor Thomas makes a very clear statement on this point:⁷

Westermarck's work perhaps affords the best example of a method of presenting ethnological materials which is very useful, but which

⁷ William I. Thomas, *Source Book for Social Origins*, 1909, p. 857.

has its limitations. It corresponds with the method of arranging materials in museums developed by Pitt-Rivers in England, a number of years ago. By this method all the knives, throwing-sticks, or other articles of a particular kind were brought together in one place, with a view to exhibiting the steps in the development of this article. But our great museums are now recognizing that it is on the whole better to arrange materials on the principle of presenting the culture of a given region as a whole. No object can be completely understood when separated from the whole culture of which it is a part, and no culture can be understood when separated from the whole culture of which it is a part, and no culture can be understood when its fragments are dislocated.

Applying this to our specific problem, the ethics of the Puritans, of the northern or the southern states, of modern business, of labor unions, can be understood only in the full setting of all the factors of English and American life.

The second question, What in the human consciousness enables it to rise to a new situation? takes us into the heart of metaphysics and theology. It is like asking, Why has protoplasm advanced to man, and man to such heights as are seen in heroes, artists, prophets, discoverers, and sages? Darwin taught how variations might be sifted; he did not know how they arise, though he supposed it to be by small fluctuations; DeVries shows that in some cases they start by sudden decisive steps. The advocates of an "orthogenic" theory hold that evolution moves, not in all directions, but by a right line of tendency. Bergson insists that all evolution is "creative," so that it is not merely futile but erroneous to seek for causes of the new. Just because the new is new, it has no explanation in the past. If consciousness "rises" to a situation, we cannot explain this higher level by anything else. The answer to our question must then read: When one is born of the spirit, we may not detect whence it cometh, but in dealing with the new situation the spirit shows its actual presence. Consciousness discloses its own creative character by its new ideals. And this, I think, comes near the truth which religion has always had at heart. The spirit is not limited by its constitution to what has been. It is not capable of complete statement in mechanistic terms. It may enter into life.

And yet the question may be very real, Why does man sometimes rise to a crisis and sometimes not? Certain civilizations have failed to meet crises in the past. Is there any indication as to whether our present civilization and moral consciousness will prove adequate to future crises? Without presuming to predict, it may be permitted to set down, without attempt at discussion, certain elements which at least offer hope. These are, first, the growing opposition to war, both for economic and for moral reasons. War in the past has wasted an incalculable amount of the best blood. Secondly, the increased strength of moral consciousness springing from the greater area of common discussion and common criticism. To Christendom, which represented a certain degree of moral unity, are now added Japan and China as peoples contributing their ideals and making demands for fair treatment while at the same time they submit their standards to discussion. Thirdly, the broader basis, within each community, which supports moral values. In other words, a democracy is in the long run safer than an aristocracy. This is not to deny that moral leaders are always few. But for available leaders it is desirable to draw upon the widest range, and leaders responsible to all sorts and conditions of men are in the end more likely to bring the whole community in safety through its perils. In the fourth place should be named the larger resources which intelligence now commands. Individual genius may reach no higher levels than at earlier times; but the method by which it can proceed successfully is more clearly seen, the collective wisdom is more available. On the one hand, education is more prevalent; on the other, research is more thoroughly organized and better equipped.

IV

The question of a standard by which moral latitude and longitude may be estimated leads at once to the issue between Absolutism and Pragmatism. At first blush there is no common ground. The absolutist sees in the pragmatist's "goods" only a welter of individual preferences, a chaos of temporary satisfactions. Over against these Münsterberg would set "eternal values" of an "over-self." These consist especially in finding iden-

tity—identity between purpose and fulfilment, between will and act. “Self-faithfulness, self-loyalty, is accordingly the only moral obligation and the only moral value.” The essence of the “over-self,” likewise, is the “will toward identical maintaining.” In different language Royce maintains that loyalty—under which he subsumes the moral life—implies in the last analysis that the cause to which loyalty devotes itself is true and real. “‘True’ must mean ‘eternally true,’ if it means anything; ‘real’ refers to the ‘whole of experience,’ which, while including all temporal happenings, is itself an ‘eternal truth.’ Unity with all life is the ideal test of the partial aims.” Conversely, the pragmatist or evolutionist sees in a mere identifying no very important value. He is suspicious of an eternal value as indicating something fixed, instead of something to be constructed, and argues that the supreme responsibility imposed by modern morality is that of working out new standards, as *versus* merely accepting or even finding something already made. He maintains that the “city out of sight” is of no help in actually directing our footsteps. He claims that ethics must follow modern science in renouncing “essences,” and for the effort to define an absolute good must substitute the effort to locate particular goods and evils, in order to attain the one and remove or lessen the other. To the religious student it is suggestive to note that even the writers of the Bible used expressions which fit into both the absolutist and the evolutionist ideal. God is “the same,” the “eternal”; but he is also the “living,” and men are “workers together with God.” And in this antithesis there is a more than superficial analogy to that between Calvinism and Arminianism.

As the “evolutionary” or “experimental” view is less familiar, it may need further statement. As it is presented by Professor Dewey,⁸ the fundamental change of attitude which it implies is this:

The classic theories all alike assumed the existence of *the end*, the *summum bonum*, the final goal; and of the separate moral force that moves to that goal. . . . The transformation in attitude is the growing belief that the proper business of intelligence is discrimination of multiple and present goods, and of the varied and immediate

⁸ John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy*.

means of their realization; not search for the one remote aim. [What we need is] study of the conditions out of which come the obstacles and the resources of adequate life, and developing and testing the ideas that, as working hypotheses, may be used to diminish the causes of evil, and to buttress and expand the sources of good.

To the fear that such a removal of a transcendental good leaves men adrift and free to follow each his own inclination, he urges that the change may relieve men from responsibility for what they cannot do, but will promote thoughtful consideration of what they may do.

If we leave absolute goods in the background, we can neither evade nor escape the problem of making more sure and expensive the share of all men in natural and real goods.

And again:

Were it a thousand times dialectically demonstrated that life as a whole is regulated by a transcendent principle to a final inclusive goal, none the less truth and error, health and disease, good and evil, hope and fear, in the concrete would remain just what and where they now are. To improve our education, to ameliorate our manners, to advance our politics, we must have recourse to specific conditions of generation.

Professor A. W. Moore claims for this position that it is the democratic movement in morals; it is the demand for the full conditions of moral responsibility. It is the claiming of the moral franchise, the right to participate in the construction, as well as the execution of the ideal. "If there is to be such a thing as moral experience aboard our craft, we must have a real part, not only in hoisting sail and washing down the decks, but in laying the course of the ship." Nor does laying the course mean merely "running for a harbor already built from all eternity." It means "building new shores"—not building them out of caprice or individual dreams, much less out of private possessions and desires, but out of the organized habits and institutions of the world in which we live, and with the method of science. In this actual world of human nature we are not free to set up any and every goal we please. We must reckon with

our fellows' rights and claims, with the growing capacities and aspirations of man. Nothing will satisfy which does not challenge and evoke these.

Certain more definite characteristics of what Professor Dewey regards as moral progress may be found in the *Ethics* of which he is joint author, for the question of moral advance for the race is not separable finally from that of individual character. The criterion here set up is that the "true or moral satisfaction" is found in the exercise of powers which produce harmony, re-enforcement, expansion of life. And what end fulfils these conditions? Only the social good. The only genuinely reasonable moral knowledge is sympathetic. The final problem of morality is to form, from a natural self of impulse and instinct, a voluntary self in which socialized desires and affections are dominant.

Perhaps it may have occurred to the reader by this time that there is not so absolute an abyss between the programmes as was at first suggested. "Loyalty to loyalty" may not indeed throw its emphasis so strongly upon justice and democracy, and yet it is not in antagonism with these. And, conversely, the evolutionist cheerfully admits that it is in a "catholic and far-sighted theory"—not in a temporary adjustment to the desires of the moment—that philosophy finds its task. In truth, the difference in point of view persists just because pragmatist and absolutist stand each upon a necessary element in moral judgment. Can there be an intelligent and thorough-going moral life without principles? Few since Socrates and Plato have attempted to say, "Yes, we need only impulse." Can principles be determined without reference to the impulses and affections, the daily needs as well as the more inclusive and permanent ends? The same Plato said frankly, "The knowledge which is only superhuman is ridiculous in man." One might say further that at one period in human development the value of definite principles has appeared to be of supreme importance, and at another the value or necessity of reconstruction, even as in theology transcendence and immanence have each made contributions. Just at present many believe that we have been standing too long upon the eighteenth-century conception of reason and the

early nineteenth-century conception of liberty. "Absolutists" in political science have admired greatly the fixity of the Constitution of the United States; "but it must be remembered," to quote Mr. Bryce, "that even the constitutions we call rigid must make their choice between being bent or being broken." We have bent our constitution several times, and just now it is believed by many that there must be much more bending if it is to serve as a supreme standard of justice in the changed conditions of modern commerce and industry. Ethical science may well ask whether it can afford to stand still. It has insisted—long and justly—upon the value of reason. It has hailed—and rightly—the worth of the individual, his happiness, and his rights. But eighteenth-century conceptions of reason and early-nineteenth-century conceptions of the individual and his happiness are not "eternal values." New goods are gaining recognition, new possibilities are given by the growth of scientific method, new claims of democracy challenge old ideas of justice. Ethical theory must rise to meet these new conditions, or be left on one side as scholastic theology was left by the world of the Renaissance.